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Fear of Iranian Victory Cited as Reason U.S. Gave Data to Iraq

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The supply of U.S. intelligence information to Iraq by the Central Intelligence Agency was begun more than two years ago with the knowledge of the State Department and others in the executive branch because of concern that Iran might be winning the war in the oil-rich Persian Gulf, U.S. sources familiar with the operation said yesterday.

The transmission to Iraq of detailed intelligence, including data from sensitive U.S. satellite reconnaissance photography, was reported in yesterday's Washington Post. White House and State Department spokesmen would not confirm the report in news briefings yesterday, citing a ban on public discussion of intelligence matters, but neither the spokesmen nor other officials sought to deny the account.

Instead, officials speaking both for attribution and on a "background" basis attempted to place the supply of U.S. intelligence information to Iraq in the context of broader administration policy.

"Our policy is one of trying to bring an end to the conflict as quickly as possible, in such a way that there are no winners and no losers," said White House spokesman Larry Speakes.

A senior administration official went on to tell reporters, on a not-for-attribution basis, that "a victory by Iraq is unlikely" and that any U.S. intelligence supplied to that country would have been "in pursuit of the goal" of ensuring that neither side could win.

Both White House and State Department officials insisted that the United States was not seeking to engineer a stalemate in the 6-year-old war by supplying secret intelligence information and political support to Iraq while making limited sales of armaments to Iran as part of hostage-related negotiations.

A U.S. policy of seeking to deny victory to Iran by a tilt of U.S. policy toward Iraq dates to late 1983, when Iranian military gains raised the possibility that the Tehran regime would triumph, according to informed sources. After an interagency review lasting at least two months, sources said, the administration devised a new set of policies centered on the conviction that an Iranian victory would be "contrary to U.S. interests."

Reflecting this assessment, which was made known to Persian Gulf nations in December 1983, and reported by the U.S. news media at the time, the administra-

tion undertook to improve its relations with Iraq across a broad front and to mount an international campaign, later known as "Operation Staunch," to reduce the flow of weapons to Iran.

In mid-1984, sources said, a U.S.-Iraqi "intelligence exchange" to be carried out by the CIA was authorized as part of the enhanced Washington ties with Baghdad. Mostly the "exchange" was one-sided, with the United States providing information of military and strategic value to Iraq, the sources said, though a lesser amount of useful data about Iranian activities was received from the Iraqi intelligence network.

The flow of U.S. intelligence is reported to have increased following the restoration of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iraq in November 1984, ending 17 years of official estrangement. Until the past few months, however, U.S. tactical military intelligence being supplied is said to have been primarily battlefield information such as the location of Iranian troop concentrations that threatened Iraqi positions.

There were conflicting reports yesterday about whether actual photographs taken by U.S. satellites have been supplied to Iran as part of the intelligence exchange. Some sources said flatly that no photographs had been passed to Iran, and others said they did not know whether photographs had been supplied.

The Post report said it could not be established whether actual photos were given, or only information obtained from photos, although the account reported that two sources had said Iraq receives "selected portions" of actual photographs.

The State Department, which was involved in policy formulation leading to supply of intelligence data to Iraq, is supposed to be kept informed of the substance of the intelligence sharing through established coordination channels involving senior State Department and CIA officials. It was unclear how much detail about the intelligence flow was made available to State in these periodic discussions.